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DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN AND EUR/ERA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZK](#) [FAID](#) [ENRG](#) [EUN](#) [USEU](#) [BRUSSELS](#)

SUBJECT: CENTRAL ASIA: LOOKING FOR WAYS TO ADD SUBSTANCE TO RELATIONS WITH THE EU

REF: A. BRUSSELS 383

[B.](#) BRUSSELS 731

Classified By: POLCOUNS LEE LITZENBERGER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are both trying to add "more substance" to their respective relationships with the EU by broaching the idea of extending the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) to their countries. Kyrgyzstan plans to propose a draft Action Plan, similar to those the EU negotiates under ENP. Uzbek diplomats portrayed the imposition of EU sanctions as having little or no impact on Uzbek policy; however, the GOU is trying to show that it is listening to the concerns of the EU. The EU Council Secretariat does not expect any significant improvement in

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EU/Uzbek relations before 2007 because President Karimov "desperately" needs the solid support of Russian and Chinese friendship through the 2007 election cycle. In the Secretariat's view, once Karimov is "reelected" next year, he

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may begin to reach out to the west for rapprochement and distance himself from Russia and China. Apals said that Germany is trying to work out a mechanism with Uzbekistan for an "international independent investigation" into Andijon possibly under UN auspices; since no one has defined the terms of such an inquiry means, there could a number of various solutions that could accommodate the Uzbeks. End Summary.

EU/Central Asia: An Overview

¶2. (C) Poloff met with Brussels-based Central Asian diplomats recently to discuss the present status of their respective countries' relations with the EU and to discuss how they see relations with the EU trending over the course of the next few years. (Comment: Officials from the Embassy of Turkmenistan in Brussels declined poloff's request for a meeting. End comment.) Because Central Asian nations are not part of the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), cooperation with the region does not have the same status as with the South Caucasus, which were added to the ENP in 2004.

To wit, Central Asian nations have varying levels of engagement with the EU at this stage depending on their strategic significance: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the most engaged; Tajikistan moderately engaged; and Uzbekistan is struggling to maintain a positive image after the imposition of EU sanctions following Andijon. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are both trying to add "more substance" to their respective relationships with the EU by broaching the idea of extending the ENP to their countries. Tajikistan receives significant assistance from the European Commission but is increasingly trying to persuade European companies to invest in the country. Uzbekistan has an uphill climb to repair its relationship with the EU; its officials maintain that they are not completely isolated from the EU and are open to dialogue. Turkmenistan does not appear to desire deeper engagement with the EU and is satisfied confining the relationship to an energy dialogue.

Uzbekistan

¶3. (C) Nodir Ganiyev and Ulugbek Agzamov, political/security officers at the Uzbekistan Mission to the EU, said that Uzbekistan wants to have a better dialogue with the EU but the circumstances for re-opening cooperation are difficult. Bilateral mechanisms for official dialogue between the EU and Uzbekistan were suspended in October and the scheduled meeting of the Cooperation Council in February was postponed indefinitely, pending Uzbekistan's acceptance of an international inquiry on Andijon. Recognizing that the relationship is strained, Ganiyev maintained that Uzbekistan is not completely 'frozen-out' of discussions with EU officials. He said that Ambassador Vladimir Norov has regular conversations with EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Central Asia Jan Kubis and that the Ambassador still has meetings with Commission and Council officials. The Ambassador, and the GOU, are trying to show that they are listening to the concerns of the EU.

14. (C) Poloff asked what the practical effect of EU sanctions has been on Uzbek thinking. They portrayed sanctions as having little or no impact on Uzbek policy and actions.

Agzamov said that Uzbekistan does not buy military equipment/arms from Europe anyway so the sanctions have had no effect on Uzbek arms procurement; he also said that Uzbek officials in Tashkent do not travel to Europe frequently either so the travel restrictions have not had a dramatic effect. Despite Agzamov's assertions that sanctions have not altered Uzbek policy, Ganiyev nevertheless said that the GOU would still work to try to have them lifted at the end of the year when they come up for review by the EU. They said the EU should take into account that the Ministers of Interior and Defense are in new positions which shows that they are undertaking their own necessary steps to redress what happened.

15. (C) Ganiyev forcefully conveyed that the Andijon events were inspired by Islamic extremists and that these people were not peacefully protesting, as was the common portrayal in the EU. He claimed that after Andijon, when the EU was calling for an international investigation, the EU never invited Ambassador Norov to explain the GOU's side of the story and that this was insulting. They proceeded to show poloff a GOU-produced documentary video (in English) which they said showed the true nature of the events at Andijon. They said they invited EU representatives to observe the "open and fair" Andijon trials but that the officials refused. They said the number one issue for the GOU is maintaining stability and combating extremist elements from Afghanistan.

16. (C) Moving on to energy, Ganiyev said that Gazprom investments in Uzbekistan would hopefully create the opportunity for the GOU to be involved in energy transport discussions with the EU "on a mutually beneficial basis." The GOU is in favor of projects that connect Caucasus energy with Europe and they hope to be involved in such projects. However, they stressed they do not want the dialogue on energy to become "politicized."

Kazakhstan

17. (C) Arman Abikenov, Counselor at the Kazakhstan Mission to the EU, cited a number of recent and forthcoming high-level meetings between EU and Kazakh officials as evidence that the EU/Kazakh relationship is strong and getting stronger: EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Central Asia Jan Kubis will travel to Astana twice in April; EU Commissioners Piebalgs and Ferrero-Waldner have received invitations to travel to Astana and have indicated that they will go, although dates have not been set. He stated that relations with the European Parliament are particularly strong and a number of "pro-Kazakh" Parliamentary Deputies have come to Astana to deepen relations.

18. (C) He said the core political issues for Kazakhstan with the EU are: a) Application for OSCE Chairman-in-Office; b) Attaining Market Economy Status from the EU; c) WTO accession. He stressed that the EU is, and will continue to be, a foreign policy priority for the Kazakh government; he noted that President Nazarbayev listed relations with the EU fourth in his list of foreign policy priorities in his recent state of the union speech. Abikenov said the GOK realizes that cooperation with the EU in trade and economics is of highest importance but that WTO accession would take precedence.

19. (C) Abikenov said that Kazakhstan is interested in starting a dialogue on possibly extending the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) to Kazakhstan; he said that Kazakhstan will start to press this at a higher level. This falls into the context of what kind of relationship the EU wants to have with Kazakhstan after 2008 when the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) expires.

Kyrgyzstan

10. (C) Aibek Tilebaliev, Minister Counselor at the Embassy of the Kyrgyzstan, said that his government wants to add "more substance" to the EU/Kyrgyz relationship. As a result, the EU has been receptive to Kyrgyz proposals for an Action Plan; Bishkek is preparing a draft for proposal at a meeting of the Cooperation Council in April but Tilebaliev lamented that it has been a very slow process - "it is hard to get people in Bishkek to focus on this." He said that the EU has conveyed clearly in meetings of the Cooperation Council that it wants constitutional reforms to continue.

11. (C) In a discussion on Kyrgyzstan's domestic political situation, Tilebaliev lamented that, unfortunately, the Kyrgyz people are still waiting for jobs and improvements one

year after the "Tulip Revolution." He speculated that new elections could occur after the constitutional referendum which is due to take place later this year. He said that politicians in Bishkek are divided over what kind of future government (presidential or parliamentary) they want. Frankly speaking, he said, people are still trying to figure what exactly these new systems would mean; referendums, he commented, "are usually in favor of the government." Tilebaliev predicted that the new Parliamentary speaker would bring needed stabilization to the Kyrgyz political scene; this would enable the Kyrgyz parliament to accomplish more. Sidestepping the question of the status of the relationship between PM Kulov and President Bakiyev, Tilebaliev said that they enjoy a "working relationship" but did not elaborate.

¶12. (C) Discussing regional cooperation, Tilebaliev said that Presidents Bakiyev and Karimov met recently in St. Petersburg and that the relationship has improved after the tension following Andijon. The Presidents have agreed to re-open some of the border crossings that were shut after Andijon and even agreed to open up some new ones. While highlighting this positive development, Tilebaliev said that difficulties still remain such as mine-placement along the border. The GOK wants to have better border demarcation and security with Tajikistan; the present border is a problem because Tajik squatters are entering southern Kyrgyzstan and taking over land illegally. The government is discussing with Tajikistan how to address this issue. Tilebaliev said that relations with China and Russia are good. Russia is increasing its troop/military hardware presence in Kyrgyzstan, and there is no friction between Bishkek and Beijing over treatment of Uighurs, which he acknowledged had been a problem in the past.

Tajikistan

¶13. (C) Behzod Mingboev, political officer at the Tajikistan Embassy in Brussels, said that Tajik/EU relations are good but noted that cooperation is mostly confined to assistance through the Commission; it is important, he said, for the GOT to improve its image in the EU. EU programs are helping with border troop training facilities to support counter-narcotics efforts. Mingboev emphasized that what the GOT really wants is more investment and it is trying to persuade EU-based companies to invest in key sectors, such as hydroelectric power. However, Mingboev said that Tajikistan is interested in capital from anywhere -- whether it is Russia, China, India, or the EU -- the Tajik economy needs investment. (Comment: Per ref B, the Commission stated that Tajikistan is the biggest recipient of assistance in the CIS and this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. End comment.)

The View from the EU Council

¶14. (C) In a separate meeting with poloff on March 22, Gints Apals, EU Council official with responsibility for Central Asia, said that while the geographical limits to the ENP have never been defined, there are few enthusiasts among Member States for extending ENP to countries in Central Asia, such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. (Comment: In an interesting aside on Kazakhstan, Apals said he heard from "Japanese sources" that Russian special services were behind the recent high-level opposition killing in Kazakhstan as a way to destabilize Nazarbayev. End Comment.) First, Apals said, the ENP has not proven that it is an effective mechanism yet; the ENP needs to make more advancements for Member States to even consider such a proposal. Second, a country like Kazakhstan could conceivably claim a "European identity" because part of its territory lies in Europe but Kyrgyzstan cannot make such a claim; for Kazakhstan, "it would take a long time" for any movement on an Action Plan and Kyrgyzstan would be even more complicated, Apals said. Perhaps these issues will be raised at the Cooperation Council meeting in Astana on April 5, Apals said, and Member States will merely be obliged to "take note" of Kyrgyzstan's and Kazakhstan's initiatives on Action Plans.

¶15. (C) Discussing Uzbekistan, Apals said that one should not expect any significant improvement in EU/Uzbek relations before 2007 because President Karimov "desperately" needs the solid support of Russian and Chinese friendship through the 2007 election cycle. Once Karimov is "reelected" next year, Apals believes, Karimov may begin to reach out to the west and EU for rapprochement and distance himself a little from Russia and China. Uzbekistan Ambassador to the EU Vladimir Norov is pressing hard for renewed dialogue with the EU, Apals said, and he has heard rumors that Norov is one of the officials that Karimov has given permission to reach out to western interlocutors. However, EUSR Kubis recently tried to make a visit to Tashkent but was told by officials there not to come, Apals said - not exactly a rebuke but not a sign of

warming relations either; EUSR Kubis enjoys good personal relations with President Karimov, Apals said, so this request had to have been made by Karimov himself. Apals said that Germany is trying to work out a mechanism with Uzbekistan for an "international independent investigation" into Andijon possibly under UN auspices; since no one has clearly defined what "international independent investigation" means, Apals said, Germany thinks there could be a number of various solutions that could accommodate the Uzbeks.

¶16. (C) On Tajikistan, Apals said that although the country is the largest recipient of EU aid in the CIS, he believes that better EU relations is not a first-tier priority for Tajikistan. President Rahmonov merely sees the EU as a political counterweight to his neighbors Russia, China, and Iran; the EU is seen as having more of an "honest broker" role amongst these powerful actors. Tajikistan is likely to continue to be the largest recipient of EU aid, Apals said, because "Kazakhstan does not need it, Turkmenistan is not asking for it, there is no traction for more aid among EU Member States for Kyrgyzstan, and political conditions do not make more aid possible for Uzbekistan."

¶17. (C) On Turkmenistan, Apals said that "60% of the EU/Turkmen relationship is devoted to energy dialogue." During EUSR Kubis' recent trip to Ashgabat, Apals got the impression that there is heavy pressure on President Niyazov from Moscow on the energy front. However, Niyazov did express interest in two options for bringing Turkmen gas to Europe, Apals said: 1) A pipeline through Kazakhstan controlled by an international consortium; 2) a Trans-Caspian Pipeline controlled by an international consortium.

Gray

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